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ABSTRACT

The experiences of a teacher for Distance University Education via Television (DUET) at Mount Saint Vincent University in Nova Scotia are related in this conference paper. The format used is that of a hypothetical conversation with a DUET faculty member, and the content is based on a series of structured interviews in which actual faculty members provided information about how DUET affects their work, their students, concepts of educational technology, and concepts of higher education. Topics covered include: (1) class participation; (2) course structure; (3) parity between distance and on-campus courses; (4) classroom environment; (5) teleconferencing; (6) teacher student interaction; (7) satellite time constraints; (8) course evaluation; and (9) casual viewers and videotaping. (MES)

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TEACHING ON DUET

CADE first face-to-face conference
June, 1986
York University
Toronto, Ontario

Although I have taught on DUET, I have not been responsible for teaching any credit courses. I have taught individual sessions over satellite and been responsible for the learning of people over 2,000 miles away and have constructed and team-taught a non-credit course in business writing skills.

My main role in DUET is that of coordinator cum instructional designer, working with faculty to enable them to teach effectively over DUET at a distance. The following is a hypothetical conversation with a faculty member who has worked with DUET. It is based on a series of structured interviews in which faculty provided information regarding how DUET appeared to affect their work, their students, concepts of educational technology, and concepts of higher education.

"My first contact with DUET was through a faculty development workshop held for faculty at Mount Saint Vincent University to get to know what DUET is. Based on that experience and recognizing that most of our students for this course lived in the greater Atlantic region, I agreed to look further at the possibility of offering my course over DUET the coming semester.

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AUTHOR ABSTRACT
(to accompany document submitted to ERIC/IR)

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title: Teaching on DUET

abstract: Faculty teaching via DUET (Distance University Education via Television) at Mount Saint Vincent University, have had to face new issues regarding the course delivered to both an on-campus and distant student population using open-broadcast videoconferencing. In this paper the personal concerns of faculty are presented for the purpose of discussing what the use of this technology for higher education means in terms of gaining faculty involvement and in terms of piggybacking distance education courses on existing on-campus courses.

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I didn't know what to expect. I had seen tv courses with the glitz and actors. Was I going to compete with those? I'm no actor by a long shot....but I'm a good teacher with good evaluations and respected by my department. I keep up on current research and regularly discuss new information I have come upon with my class.

I was also concerned about discussion: discussion is a large chunk of my class. I like my students to think about what they hear and see and to not only discuss these with me but with their other class mates. With students in the classroom I had no big concern .... but for those in "tv land"... well... I wasn't too sure they would be able to participate at the same level. In fact, I wasn't sure whether they would have library resources to do the work let alone other people interested in the subject to discuss the material with. I needed to be convinced that I was going to be able to effectively handle the learning needs of all my student and I wasn't convinced that teaching over DUET was going to handle it well enough for me.

We (DUET staff and myself) went over the course structure several times before my "premier." They asked me questions about the course structure, the kind of experience I wanted for my students and why. They asked me about the kind of participation I wanted from students; about the kind of assignments and tests.

They told me what DUET was capable of doing for distance students and those on-campus and asked me if some changes they were recommending were suitable and in line with what I wanted for the students.

One thing I liked during this process is that they helped me realize some of the expectations I had for my students that I hadn't recognized that I had. In one case in particular, we concluded that the experience I normally use in class was not directly transferrable over DUET. They came up with several alternatives from which I could choose and promised unfailing support in implementing these changes to the course.

There had been a lot of talk about parity between this distance course and the course on campus. The change agreed upon was instituted for both on-campus and off-campus students. That is perhaps the point that sells DUET most to the university and to neighboring institutions accepting credits earned over DUET. They know its based on the on-campus version of the course, that distance students do the same work as on-campus students, and that it is conducted in a manner acceptable to universities. DUET has been more "acceptable" to other universities and therefore to many distance students who want specialized courses not offered by universities in which they are enrolled.

I did , however, find DUET different from a regular classroom: all the cameras, extra people and broadcast time

frames I had to adhere to. At first it was uncomfortable, especially knowing that not only were my registered students watching, but also watching was anyone who happened to "tune-in." Anyone could tune in.

It had an effect on class participation at first. It took several weeks longer to break the ice to get a discussion going. I had to learn some new techniques, too, in order to make sure my distance students were able to experience the sessions: learning how the tv picture frame interacted with the information I was presenting, and how I could change my presentation of materials to ensure distance students could clearly perceive the information I presented. I learned a lot about pictures shown on tv and I learned how to make decisions about the pictures I presented .

That was the best thing about DUET: no one told me how I was going to do things: they suggested, we discussed, and I made a decision. The ball was always in my court.

The same with teleconferencing: I learned that for my distance students that learning with a tv and telephone was a new experience for them and that I had to be aware of this novelty. I learned techniques for making sure distance students participated in the class discussion and how to "break the ice with them although I could never see them.

Not seeing them, I I was tempted to forget about them for a while, until I had several conversations with them on the telephone and gotten to know them as people. I spent my life on the telephone either calling distance students or receiving calls from them.

Sometimes they sent me pictures of themselves and their families. I would put these under the overhead camera to introduce them to other distance students. I received much feedback saying how much they appreciated seeing other students and knowing about them. The experience became more human. In one instance, I had three female students, all pregnant, taking the course. One even decided she had to keep up with the course in the delivery room of the Grace Maternity Hospital . It gave a whole new meaning to the term "distance delivery systems." In another, the fiance of a distance student felt he had to call me first to tell me he was proposing to one of my students. He just felt she spent more time with me (through my course) than with any other person, therefore , he thought I should be the first to know. In another instance, I felt I knew the male student so well though we had never met face-to-face, that I flirted outrageously over the telephone and television. We really brought learning to life. After another session I received a call from woman representing a group of casual viewers who were interested enough to ask for a reading list and who wanted to form their own study group (unregistered however).

That is what amazed me so much: is how we came to know each others as people across the distances. Some of these people I have never met face to face nor do I expect to, yet in a way we have touched each other in a way which was very unexpected and in a way which made the experience real for both of us.

What did I like most about the experience? I learned how to teach in a different way. I'm curious and that was a task which I could easily set to work on. I also liked the idea of have at least one student assistant in the classroom all the time to help me with visuals and sound as I needed help. I loved the distance students. They excelled on assignments and tests (as could be expected, I am told), and added to the sessions with their life experiences. I think the on-campus students recognized this as well. We had a classroom as big as Atlantic Canada and all the experiences of these students at our fingertips.

What I liked least was the satellite time constraint. I couldn't break whenever I wanted to and I had to plan ahead to fill the entire time. I also had to be super-organized to have materials ready to send out to distance students a week earlier than for on-campus students. In a way that's good because it saves me from my tendency to wait to the last minute. But in another way it takes away from my ability to be spontaneous with information and incorporating that into my teaching. I also have problems with knowing that anyone could be watching. There has been the occasional cocktail conversation with colleagues who

have tune in and have comments they wish to make regarding my teaching. I am very uncomfortable with their "off-the-cuff" evaluations of my work, especially since I do not want their comments.

At the near the end of the term students were asked to complete an evaluation of DUET. When they were returned and collated DUET staff and I went over the results and discussed what they meant. It gave me an opportunity to reflect on the entire process and its meaning for both on-campus and distance students. What really surprised me were the glowing comments made by distance students who said they appreciated the availability of the course.

I am uneasy about casual viewers and videotaping. When I'm shopping I've noticed more people staring at me and some who have stopped me to ask me if they've seen me on tv. I get a kick out of it in a way but sometimes the familiarity with which they greet me leaves me feeling exposed or "assaulted". I've had exuberant "fans" stop me to say they have videotaped my presentation to show at a church meeting, never thinking about the violation of copyright and my personal stake in the presentation which is my creation. I feel a loss of control over my content and don't know how to deal with it. DUET staff have advised me that both I and the university are protected by copyright but I still feel unconvinced that this is enough.

Whether it is justified or not, I still feel there is a bit of stress in teaching over tv knowing there is a casual viewer population whom I always must keep in mind. In a way I'm doing more than my normal teaching for the university. In a way I've become a public relations figure as well with responsibilities that go with it. I am not compensated for teaching on DUET above my normal salary with the exception of additional support staff for specified functions. I'm not so sure I don't deserve additional remuneration for my DUET teaching.

DUET has exposed me to an entirely new dimension of teaching and I am grateful for that. I now think that I can teach both distance and on-campus students and would teach again in the future. I like the general spontaneity that is possible. I like the "broadened" classroom. My ego loves the attention of people who call and write to say they appreciate my course. For these I am grateful. There are many elements DUET and faculty need to work out as I mentioned above. The bottom line is, though, that I feel I have control, and that we work out concerns together."